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ABSTRACT

Organizational, curriculum, and staff utilization patterns of New England middle schools were explored in this study. Fifteen percent of the 315 New England middle schools were randomly selected and questionnaires were sent to their 46 principals. There were twelve major findings concerning organizational patterns including the fact that individualized instruction proved dominant. In addition, 86 percent of the schools were graded, and the grade organizations 6-7-8 and 5-6-7-8 account for the organization of [illegible].1 percent of the schools surveyed. Concerning curriculum pattern there were seven major findings, including the finding that clubs and interschool sports were offered in all grades. In addition, art, general music, general science, and home economics were required courses, while band and chorus were electives. For staff utilization patterns there were eight findings including the discovery that the majority of schools had assistant principals as part of the instructional staff. Also, the majority of schools reported instructional teams of 4-8 teachers, although most did not designate team leaders or department heads. It is recommended that middle school buildings be constructed to meet the special needs of middle school students, and that more investigation should be undertaken concerning the behavior of young adolescents. (Author/JM)

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A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF ORGANIZATIONAL, CURRICULUM AND STAFF UTILIZATIONAL PATTERNS OF SELECTED NEW ENGLAND MIDDLE SCHOOLS

by

Ethel V. Gore, Ed.D.

EA 010 953

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Introduction

Because we cherish the dream of providing the best educational opportunities for all youth, we are still searching for better ways of designing school experiences for our young people. The search for better, more humanistic educational purposes and practices has led to a reexamination of the question: how can we best provide for the educational experiences of pre and early adolescents? The establishment of the junior high school in the early 1900's was an attempt to answer this question. Some educators believe that the junior high concept has not continued to be a good plan because it has not met the needs of middle school children.

Much progress in American school districts has occurred in the past ten years in developing and implementing new programs for pre and early adolescents. Building upon growing research on the needs and characteristics of emerging adolescent learners, innovative programs have been developed for youth in the middle grades. The term "emergent" middle school is used to describe the product of this organizational plan. Compton (1976) describes it as an organizational plan that includes the stage of human development known as transescence. This includes pupils of the ages 10-14 or the years in which the youngsters begin to experience rapid development from childhood to adolescence.[1]

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[1]Mary Compton, "A Survey of Middle Schools," Middle School Journal 5 (June 1976): 3.

The middle school in the United States is a relatively new phenomena. Twenty years ago there were less than ten in this country. Several surveys were reported in the literature in the 1960s. Major ones were done by Wright and Green (1963), Educational Research Services (1965), Brod (1966), Cuff (1967), NEA (1967) and Alexander (1968). Most were limited to a portion of states, school districts willing to respond to requests for information or school systems of specific minimum size student populations.

Kealy (1969-70) and Compton (1974) conducted surveys based on Alexander's 1968 survey and definitions. Both are further evidence of the vast increase in numbers of middle schools.

The number of middle schools in the United States is still on the increase. Cuff's (1965-66) survey revealed 29 states were operating a total of 499 middle schools.[1] A survey conducted by Mellinger and Rockanskus indicated that this total had increased to 1,696 by 1970.[2] During the 1974-75 school year 3,224 middle schools were in operation.[3] This expansion of reorganization of middle grades seems to be the result of rethinking of our education priorities which resulted from the "new cirriculum" that emerged in the 1960s.

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[1]William A. Cuff, "Middle Schools on the March," Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary School Principals 51 (February 1967): 82-86.

[2]Max Bough, John McLure and Tom Sinks, "The Middle School --A Fine State Survey," The Clearing House 4 (November 1972): 162.

[3]Betty J. Foster and Judi M. Carpenter, Statistics of Public Elementary and Secondary Day Schools, Fall 1975, National Center of Education Statistics, 1976.

The rationale behind these priorities was defined by Alexander in 1969. He cited:

> "1. To provide a program especially adapted to the wide range of individual differences and special nedds of the in-between ager.
>
> "2. To create a school ladder arrangement that permits continuity of education from school entrance to exit.
>
> "3. To facilitate through a new organization, the introduction of needed innovation in the curriculum and instruction."[1]

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine the present status of the middle school in New England in reference to the organizational, curriculum and staff utilization patterns. Another purpose was to compare specific data collected to similar data collected in a study of middle schools in the North Central states.

Related Literature

The literature was examined and was presented from four vintage points: history, rationale, organizational patterns and utilization patterns.

Research concerning the middle school is now available, and, while not conclusive, it can help clarify certain aspects of the middle school issue. Much of the middle school's research before 1970 was descriptive in nature and was conducted

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[1]Betty J. Foster and Judi M. Carpenter, Statistics of Public Elementary and Secondary Day Schools, Fall 1975, National Center for Educational Statistics, 1976, p. 32.

by the middle school advocates. They were primarily concerned with the growth patterns and opinions of staff. A few described middle school and junior high likenesses and differences. A smaller number of studies dealt with the development of theoretical models for organizing and implementing middle schools. These descriptive studies were necessary in that they provided the foundations from which the empirical studies have emerged. One such study was done by Case (1970) where test scores of middle school versus traditional school were statistically analyzed.

Middle school research like the research conducted in areas contains both strengths and weaknesses. The following strengths and weaknesses were noted during this review of the literature.

Strengths:

1. The many middle school surveys done by the variety of individuals and groups have provided a clear picture of its growth patterns.

2. The studies, though varied, have brought into focus middle school needs such as the need for uniform staff certification.

3. The many descriptive studies have provided a base from which the much needed empirical studies can emerge.

4. Identification of not only academic needs but emotional needs of transescents and models for developing the framework for their place within the K-12 continum.

5. Middle school research appears to be moving in the direction of empirical studies.

Weaknesses:

1. The findings among the studies are so varied that no middle school policies may be generated from them.
2. Much of the research has been done by middle school advocates, thus, there are many biases in their findings.
3. The portion of data based on empirical studies is still too small.
4. Only one middle school program could be reviewed that measured its success on hard data.

Procedures

Middle schools located within states in the area of accreditation of the New England Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools were selected as the population of this study. Fifteen percent of the 315 New England school were randomly selected. All of the states have identified middle schools and at least one school from each state was included in the sample. A questionnaire was sent to 46 New England middle school principals.

The questionnaire was divided into three sections. Part I requested the following information concerning the organizational patterns of the middle school:

1. The grades included in the school.
2. The number of students in the school.
3. The enrollment by grade in the school.
4. The geographic location of the school.
5. The length of the school day in the school.
6. The grouping practices in the school.
7. The instructional strategies used in that school.

8. The first year the school operated as a middle school.
9. The purpose for which the physical facility was constructed.
10. The outstanding physical features of the facility.

Part II of the questionnaire sought the following information in relation to the curriculum patterns of the middle school:

1. The special subject taught.
2. The activities available to students.
3. The number of electives.
4. The courses taught on a co-educational basis.
5. The accelerated programs.
6. The remedial programs.

Part III of the questionnaire requested the following information relating to the staff utilization patterns of the middle school:

1. The number of administrators.
2. The number of professionals.
3. The number of classified personnel.
4. The certification of the teachers.
5. The degree status of the teachers.
6. The administrative responsibilities of teachers.
7. The number of teachers assigned to them.
8. The average academic assignment of classroom teachers.

Findings

The data was organized, analyzed and presented according to the three sections of the survey instrument. The results of the collected data were illustrated on 42 tables. The following are summaries of the three parts of the questionnaire.

The major findings of Part I, concerning organizational patterns of the schools studied, are:

1. Ninety-three percent of the questionnairs were returned by the respondents.

2. The most consistent grade organization pattern was 6-7-8 and 5-6-7-8 the more frequently used. The two organizational patterns account for 93.1 percent of the schools surveyed.

3. Seventy-nine percent of the schools of the 43 schools had school population of 351-1000.

4. The findings indicated that the schools surveyed were well distributed over the three geographic sectors (39.4 percent--urban; 37.1 percent--rural; 23.2 percent--corporate limits).

5. The most consistent length of the school day was six hours, with six hours and thirty minutes the other more frequently used. These two lengths of school day accounted for 81.2 percent of the 43 schools surveyed.

6. There was at least a 32 percent difference favoring heterogenous grouping in all the grades surveyed.

7. Individualized instruction proved dominant in the four grades surveyed.

8. Interdisciplinary teams, flexible scheduling, and outdoor education were used by respondents in all grades but neither were dominant strategies.

9. The data revealed a mean of 58 percent across the grades surveyed for utilization of co-educational instruction.

10. Large group instruction was used in all the grades surveyed with a mean of 43 percent utilization, while the mean utilization was 56 percent for small group instruction.

11. The most consistent school building organizational plan was the graded which accounted for 86 percent of the 43 schools surveyed.

12. f the middle schools, 53.5 percent were so organized after 1970 and 60.4 percent of the buildings were not constructed for the middle school organization concept.

The major findings of Part II concerning curriculum patterns of the schools studied are:

1. Fifty percent or more of the schools surveyed revealed that art, general music, general science, home economics were required courses while band and chorus were listed as electives.

2. Interschool sports were offered in all grades surveyed revealing a mean of 56.4 percent participation across grade levels.

3. More than 70 percent of all schools surveyed included intramural sports, thus making it a dominant factor in this sample.

4. More than 60 percent of all schools surveyed indicated the inclusion of student publications, student government, band and chorus.

5. Clubs were offered in all grades surveyed randing from 16.5 percent participation in grade six to 38.1 percent participation in grade 7.

6. There was a direct relation of the number of student elective offerings and the increasing of grade levels.

7. The utilization of co-educational instruction in home economics, and industrial arts increased as the grade levels increased, while the converse was true for physical education.

The major findings of Part III concerning staff utilization patterns of the schools studied are:

1. A majority of the schools reporting indicated an assistant principal as part of their instructional staff.

2. The number of classroom teachers ranged from 11-50 in most of the 43 schools surveyed.

3. The range of psychologist, pupil personnel, media specialists and guidance counselors was one to two per school.

4. The 43 middle schools surveyed reported that the majority of non-professional service ranged from one to five per school.

5. A great variation of elementary and secondary certification existed for teachers of all grades surveyed. More schools reported 100 percent elementary certification for teachers of grades five and six while more schools in grades seven and eight reported 100 percent of teachers being certified on the secondary level.

6. The degrees held by teacners of the 43 schools surveyed ranged from the bacjelor's to the doctorate including a small number holding six-year certificates.

7. A majority of the respondents did not designate teachers as team leaders and department heads.

8. A majority of the schools surveyed reported instructional teams consisting of from four to eight teachers.

Comparison of Data:

Specific elements of this study were compared with similar counterparts of the data collected by Dubel (1976) to determine equivalency and/or further, to determine the possibility that any differences between the samples can be accounted for by chance fluctuations.

The findings of these comparison are summarized as:

1. The data collected revealed significant differences between the Dubel study and the present study in respect to grouping practices and organizational strategies.

2. The data collected revealed significant differences between the studies for course offerings and student activities.

3. The data collected revealed significant differences between the studies for staff support positions.

Conclusions

1. The grade organizational patterns, student population, geographical location of buildings and length of school day of middle schools are determined by local concerns, priorities, available facilities and individual needs.

2. There are no specialized preparation programs and certification requirements for middle school teachers since staffing has resulted primarily from available local personnel and others who are either elementary of secondary prepared and certified.

3. Small group instruction is very much a part of the middle school program, yet heterogeneous student grouping prevails.

4. There is uniformity in curriculum offerings and co-educational instruction.

5. It is not clear that the assistant principal or the assignment of teachers in terms is perceived as essential in a middle school program.

6. The majority of middle school teachers have more preparation in New England than middle school teachers in other regions.

Recommendations

1. Middle school buildings should be constructed or renovated to meet the special needs of middle school students. Building planners should consider the inclusion of woodwork shops, home economics facilities, rooms for support personnel, and so on.

2. More investigation should be undertaken of the transescent's (young adolescent's) behavior and learning styles.

3. More middle school planning should be based on what research has identified as middle school programs.

4. Formative or process evaluation should be central to the planning and implementation of middle school program.

5. Staffing needs should be studied to determine the most effective and efficient staffing patterns for given middle school situations.

6. There should be specific staff development programs for faculties of middle schools. Such programs should encompass the knowledge of the behavior and development of the transescent.

7. Standards for middle school teacher certification should be more uniform and efforts should be made to work toward regional and/or national standards.

8. Further studies should be conducted to investigate the relative effectiveness of various middle school teaching strategies.

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